

Preface and acknowledgements

The texts of the *Blue Nile Project* dossier here introduced constitute the final report of the field archaeological work carried out from 1990 to 2000 in the Blue Nile basin, mainly in the areas of Wadi Soba, Wadi Rabob and Wadi el Hasib on the east bank near Khartoum, by personnel of different Spanish academic and research institutions. The main centre has been the Department of Prehistory of the University Complutense of Madrid (V́ctor M. Ferńndez and Alfredo Jimeno), with the assistance of the Department of Physical Anthropology of the same university (Gonzalo Tranco and Beatriz Robledo), the Department of Prehistory and Ancient History of the National Open University (UNED) (Mario Menéndez), the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, CSIC) (Javier Lario), and the Laboratory of Archaeobotany, Department of Prehistory, CSIC (Pilar López García and José A. López Sáez). Preliminary data on plants offered by examination of microscopic residues on pottery in a different laboratory were not substantiated by further analytical evidence and hence will not be referred herein. Researchers from other institutions, such as the Center for Development Studies of the University of Bergen (Anwar Abdelmagid Osman) and the Museum of Natural History of Geneva (Louis Chaix) also contributed to the work.

During a short field season in March 1990, members of the project (VMF, AJ, MM) began the surface survey on the East bank of the Blue Nile, in the Wadi Soba area. This zone is situated near Khartoum eastwards of the Neolithic site excavated in the 1989 season at the suburb town of Hag Yusuf. The survey was temporarily halted in 1991, then resumed in 1992 (between January 14th to February 5th by VMF, AJ, MM, JL), 1993 (January 15th to February 4th by VMF, AJ, JL), and 1994 (January 29th to February 14th by VMF, AJ, MM). The following seasons were dedicated to the extensive excavation of sites previously selected, under the direction of VMF, AJ, and MM. The Mesolithic sites of Sheikh Mustafa and El Mahalab were excavated from November 12th to December 6th 1994, January 20th to February 7th 1996, and February 8th to 13th 1996. The Neolithic site of Sheikh el Amin was excavated from January 25th to February 19th 1997, and from January 24th to February 15th 1998. No fieldwork was done in 1999. In the field season of 2000 an archaeological survey was carried out in the areas situated further east and south of Wadi Soba, investigating the Wadi Rabob, el Hag and el Hasib basins (January 21st to February 10th, directed by VMF). A general exploration of the Blue Nile basin south of Khartoum was also carried out during a week period in the 2000 field campaign (only days of fieldwork have been listed).

Participants in the field work, besides the researchers already mentioned, were Gonzalo Tranco (1989), Salomé Zurinaga (1994-1997), Alicia Checa (1994), Emilio Hornero (1994), Raúl Flores (1994-1997), Eduardo García (1994-1997), Juan Pedro Benito (1994-1996), Carlos Tabernero (1994-1996), Ignacio de la Torre (1996-1998), Rachel Griener (1996-1997), Jordi Juan (1998), Alfredo González Ruibal (2000) and Alfonso Fraguas (2000). Their continuous hard work and good spirit was essential to the successful conclusion of the field project. Workers at the excavations were Khalid Tahir, Omar Ali, Hamid Mohammed, Usama Mohammed, Galib Mohammed, Al Amin Agab, Anema Omar, Tahib Hassan, Khalid Moudawy, Osama Mohammed, Mohammed Ahmed, Hasouba el Tayeb (Soba and Sheikh Mustafa), Bala al Bet, Mohammed Yusif, Idris Abdalah, Babiker Ali, Mohammed Abdalah, Tahir Abdelferil, Jahala Mubarak, Abdelmagid Babiker (El Mahalab), Hamid Shaib, Arbab Omar, Daud Hassan, Amin al Taieb, Mohammed el Kami, Abdelrahman Mohammed, Hammadani Mohammed, Ali Amin, Yassir Mohammed, Saami Abdelrahman, Geili Al Badawi, Mustafa al Amin, Yadallah Taha, Babiker Ahmed, Al Amin al Bashir, Ibrahim Hamad and Hassan Abdelrahim (Sheikh el Amin).

The research was funded by several Spanish institutions. The University of Madrid contributed with a grant in the 1990 field campaign. The Institute for the Spanish Historical Heritage of the Ministry of Education and Culture financed the fieldwork from 1994 to 1997 and in 2000. The General Directorate for Scientific and Technological Research of the same Ministry contributed from

1992 to 1994 (project PB89-0084, “The origin of food-production economy in the Middle Nile”) and from 1996 to 1998 (project PS95-0142, “Holocene socio-economic evolution in the Middle Nile valley”).

We are particularly grateful to the Sudan National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) for its precious support and collaboration throughout the entire project. Special thanks are due to its directors during our work in Central Sudan: Usama Abdelrahman Al-Nur, Ahmed M. Ali Al-Hakem and Hassan Hussein Idris. Most valuable technical assistance was given by the Excavation Section of the NCAM, especially by Dr. Salah Mohammed Ahmed, head of the section, and the Technical Inspectors that accompanied us in the field work and archaeological analysis: Arbab Hassan Hafiz (1990), Abdelhay A. Fedlelmoula (1990, 1992), Tahir Adam Al-Nur (1993, 1994), Umran Ali Fath-Al-Raham (1994) and Amel Hassan Gismalla (1996-2000). Our devoted driver Hamad M. made possible the work everyday since 1992 to the end of the project. Many other staff members from the NCAM were also involved in the project at various stages, and the work would not have been possible without their assistance. To all of them we want to express our most grateful reconnaissance and friendly memories.

While in Khartoum we received assistance and logistical support from the Spanish embassy, until it eventually closed in 1993, and thanks are due to the ambassador Tomás Solís and the personnel, especially Miguel Prados, Ramón de Abadal and Carmen Martín. Researchers from the French Section of the Antiquities Service and the Direction of the French Cultural Centre in Khartoum gave invaluable professional advice, hospitality and friendship: Patrice and Brigitte Lenoble, Jacques and Ulla Reinold, Jean and Martine Roland, Francis and Carla Geus, and Yves Lecointe. Our friendly thanks also go to Isabella Caneva, Elena A.A. Garcea, Charles Bonnet, Louis Chaix, Matthieu Honegger and the late Christian Simon.

Other specialists were involved in the post-excavation work, contributing reports or other assistance. Anwar Abdelmagid, Louis Chaix, Gonzalo Tranco, Beatriz Robledo, Pilar López and José A. López are credited in their respective contributed texts. A grateful acknowledgement goes to Víctor Manuel-Valdés (IES La Paloma, Madrid) for the chemical analysis of the Sheikh el Amin soils. Also to Juan Pedro Benito, Eduardo García, Alfredo González-Ruibal, Marta Mejías, Victoria Pérez, Antonio Chain and Sabah Walid for making most of the archaeological drawings, and Alfonso Fraguas for their support with the computer work. Emilio Hornero carried out the text formatting and thanks are here expressed to his great skill and patience.

The papers in this dossier have enormously benefited from Anwar Abdelmagid’s great insight and scholarship, through fruitful and memorable discussions. Alfredo González-Ruibal’s fertile ideas are also acknowledged.

The archaeological finds of the survey are in the National Museum, Khartoum. The bulk of the material from the excavations at Sheikh Mustafa, Al Mahalab and Sheikh Al Amin –numbering in the tens of thousands of artefacts for the pottery material and hundreds of thousands for the lithic material– is stored in the Mission house at Soba village, property of Hassan Hussein *Bashab*. A small but representative sample of the recovered material both in the survey and excavations, the survey and excavation archive including field-notes, site and material summary data, maps and photographs are in the offices of the Department of Prehistory, University Complutense, 28040 Madrid.

This dossier is about both past populations and present day theories and methodologies. Our aim was to contribute to the historical construction in Northeastern Africa as a further step in its emancipation.

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